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EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH UPON ANIMALS,

COMMONLY CALLED

VIVISECTION,

BEING A PAPER READ BEFORE

The Donum Social and Literary Society,

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BY

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EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH UPON ANIMALS,

OR, AS IT IS MORE COMMONLY CALLED,

VIVISECTION.

THE subject of my paper has for some years formed a theme for the platform, the pulpit, and the drawing-room. It has been one of the “burning questions of the day.” It is therefore a proper one to bring before a meeting of men of letters and science. Especially is this the case at the present time, when fresh agitation, legislation, and persecution are threatened.

And what do the public know about the subject they so glibly talk over and condemn? From what I hear and read, I unhesitatingly answer—nothing! An expression made use of lately by a very eminent and highly esteemed bishop, when speaking on a subject relating to his own profession, is equally applicable to this. It was to the following effect:—“When we consider the miles of falsity which have been written on this subject, is it not time for us to be moving in the matter?” This is not the place, in my opinion, to discuss purely professional questions. The public have, however, taken the matter up, and made it a general question, and as such I shall treat it.

By way of introduction, I will give you a few notes from one of the annual reports of the Inspector under the Vivisection Act. I take that for 1879, as coming first to hand. The total number of experiments performed in England and Wales was 270, during that year. Of these, 126 were performed under the restrictions of the general licence, requiring the animals to be rendered unconscious before the experiments commenced, and to be killed before consciousness returned: 61 were under certificates for

experiments in illustration of lectures—these animals were treated in the same manner : 35 were under special certificates for experiments without anæsthetics : and 24 were under certificates which dispensed with the obligation to kill the animal before recovery of consciousness. I beg your special attention to the following :—The number of experiments “in which there is reason to believe that any *material* suffering was caused was about 25. Of these, 15 were cases in which disease followed the inoculation of infectious matter, but in which no painful operation was performed : and 10 were experiments upon as many frogs, in which an incision of the skin was required for the introduction beneath it of a medicinal substance.” Says the *Lancet*, “If the suffering in the latter case is to be described as *material*, we should be interested to learn the Inspector’s idea of suffering which may be designated as trifling !” This report includes all the vivisections that were made during the year, both for experimental research, and also for demonstration to students. To discuss the subject fully, it would be necessary to treat experimental research and demonstration separately. The justification of the vivisection would not be the same in each.

I propose, to-night, to consider the general question of the right of man to take the life of the lower animals for his own benefit, and shall include therein, whatever suffering may be entailed thereby to the animal, which, in the case of vivisection, is usually very slight, and where anæsthetics are used, is only the distress of commencing insensibility, which must be considered to be less than that of ordinary death. And it must be understood that I refer to vivisection for a well-defined purpose ; performed by a skilled observer, in the most humane manner possible, and repeated as many times only, as is necessary to establish the correctness of an observation.

Wanton cruelty, I pray I may never defend !

The usefulness of vivisection is all but universally admitted in my profession, though it is not so universally admitted as justifiable. I unhesitatingly express the opinion that experimental research on living animals has proved of the greatest possible assistance in promoting the progress of medicine and surgery. I am not exceeding the

truth when I tell you that the progress made during the last few years has been in very great measure due to these experiments, and that this progress could not have been made without them. Any candid reader of the evidence before the Royal Commission will admit this. Need I do more than mention the names of Sir THOMAS WATSON (the late), Sir WILLIAM JENNER, Sir WILLIAM GULL, Sir JAMES PAGET, Dr. WILKS, Dr. ANDREW CLARK, and Mr. SPENCER WELLS as uncompromising supporters of this mode of research to prove what I say ; and add the words of the *Lancet*, that “the few professional names found upon the lists of the anti-vivisectionists are of no weight whatever when compared with the numbers of the highest reputation, who declared themselves in favour of leaving the science of Physiology to pursue its course unhindered by harassing enactments” ?

How far, then, is the taking away of life for the benefit of man consistent with the scheme of creation, and with the political, social, and moral government of the world ?

The succession of life on the earth has been a mixture of creation and destruction, beauty and decay, happiness and misery. This has been so from the very first commencement. Geologists tell us of exquisite beauty in ages of a remoteness beyond our ability to conceive. And in that distant period, as now, there was suffering and death—long ere “the fruit of that forbidden tree . . . brought death into the world, and all *our* woe.” The remains of weapons of attack and defence are found among the earliest fossils known. The fact that animals have, through all time, fed on each other, is testified to, not only by the general anatomical character of their remains, but also by the actual finding of animal remains in their stomachs and excrements. They have been overwhelmed and turned into stone in the very act ! The carnivora appear to have even preceded the herbivora in their appearance in this world.

Eat and be eaten, is the rule of life from the beginning. The weakest goes to the wall. The fittest survive. These may be taken as axioms in the scheme of creation. When man was introduced—the highest and most powerful creature the world has known—no new law was made for

him. He, like some other animals older than himself, was a mixed feeder, carnivorous and herbivorous. He, in common with the lower animals, destroys life for food ; he also destroys it for a pastime, and other reasons.

Hunting through all ages has been deemed a legitimate amusement. Even the gods have been credited with finding amusement therein. And the realms of future happiness are by some believed to be a happy hunting ground. We are told in that book which we all revere, that Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord. And there is nothing written therein which conveys the idea that the Almighty disapproves of the amusement. So general has the destruction of life been through all ages, that were it not for the annunciation "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," and, "Thou shalt do no murder," it would be difficult to prove that it has special value.

In the political and social government of the world the same rule has obtained. The weaker nations have suffered for the benefit of the stronger. The weakest has gone to the wall. The less fit have disappeared ; been eaten up, figuratively and actually, by the more fit. The more powerful class, though not always the more numerous, has always endeavoured to benefit itself at the expense of the weaker. All great improvements have been the cause of loss and suffering to a certain number. "The greatest benefit to the greatest number," the policy of to-day, too often means great loss and suffering, quite undeserved, to the minority. Hardly a fashion changes but it occasions ruin to numbers of unoffending people.

Even the moral government of the world has been conducted on the same principle. Sacrifices of innocent animals to propitiate an offended deity, are common to most religions, past and present. In the great Theocracy of the world, daily sacrifice of innocent creatures was ordered by the Deity Himself. The scapegoat, also, bore the sins of the people.

If, then, all this suffering is the rule of nature, part of the scheme of creation ; a fact which must be accepted by the believer, and the non-believer in revealed religion alike ; why the objection to the infliction of an infinitely

small amount of suffering and death, when the present and future temporal happiness of the whole human race is sought to be promoted thereby? Aye, and that of the lower animals also! Answer, why?

It is lawful to destroy life for food, the use of which is only of very short duration! It is lawful to destroy life for amusement of a very fleeting character, under the name of sport! Why, then, is there impropriety in inflicting pain and death on a small number of creatures when the object is not only to prolong the life of the great multitude, but to increase their happiness also? The death of an animal for sport, gratifies more or less the sportsman who takes part in it. In many cases, no other single individual is benefited, and the only one who is, forgets it immediately after! The finest, noblest sport, so called, is but a cruel way of taking life, which, if required, could be taken more mercifully, more expeditiously. Who that has been in at the death of a coursed hare, a fox, a wild red deer, has not felt sympathy for the poor creature, until he has got accustomed to the sight?

And if this kind of sport is cruel, what shall we say of that other kind? Hunting by the Royal Buckhounds of carted deer deprived of their horns, and rendered perfectly powerless to defend themselves! Pigeon shooting, at Hurlingham! Coursing—limited at Bank End, Doncaster! Are any of these worthy of the name of sport? Are they not gross brutality? Yet they are legal! Joined in by the highest class of society! No agitation is got up to suppress them! Oh, for the inconsistency of our race!

The infliction of death by the experimental observer is actuated by a different motive from that of the sportsman, true and false. It is not mere slaughter for slaughter's sake. Not merely to gratify a passion, or vanity, or to afford amusement. If it has been justified by the considerations which have led to it, it has been a sacrifice—a vicarious sacrifice—not to an offended deity, but consistently with the laws of creation, for the benefit of the more highly favoured. That the happiness of man, and such animals as are tended by him, may be increased, and that the misery which is co-mingled therewith, as an integral part of creation, may be lessened thereby.

And are not the men who follow and encourage this mode of discovery reckoned, universally, the great benefactors of their species; the most self-denying, the most humane of men? Who among their detractors can hope to equal them in the benefits they have conferred on their species? Is it envy, of those whom they cannot equal, that makes anti-vivisectionist agitators so unjust, so virulent in their accusations? Methinks it is! or, even a worse reason! "It is interesting to observe," says the *Lancet*, "how those who profess such unbounded love for the lower animals, and who, professedly, shudder at the bare thought of the least physical injury done to creatures beneath them in the scale, throw all their mercy and charity to the winds when there is a chance of inflicting a moral injury upon their intellectual superiors and equals. The manner in which the anti-vivisectionists have treated those who ventured to differ from them, shows that at best they have no appreciation of mercy. The process of gibbeting by advertisement, which has been practised upon many honourable members of our profession, is, we have no hesitation in saying, as unworthy an act as ever entered into the mind of man to perpetrate. We feel sure, however, that the sound sense which ever has corrected the impulsive sentimentalism of the English, will not allow them to be guided, in their judgment of a profession or of individuals, by those whose business it seems to be to dip their pens in venom, and exercise their "Christian" skill in inflicting wounds on others, no matter how lasting or how deep, provided they leave no scar."

And now, gentlemen, to sum up:—I conclude, then, that pain, suffering and death, ~~often~~ less for the more highly favoured, have always existed as part of the scheme of creation; and as part of the political, social, and moral government of the world. And such being the case, I infer that experimental research on the lower animals—vivisection—is not only justifiable, but, when properly conducted, highly commendable; seeking, as it does, the present and future welfare and happiness of the whole human race, and of many of the lower animals also.